



## FARMERS SELLING PRODUCT TO LOCAL SCHOOLS

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### CONNECTICUT'S FARM-TO-SCHOOL PROGRAM

[PA 06-135](#) (§ 21) established Connecticut's farm-to-school program to encourage the use of Connecticut-grown farm products in school cafeterias. The law requires the Department of Agriculture (DoAg), in consultation with the state Department of Education (SDE), to run the program to promote and facilitate the sale of Connecticut-grown farm products by farms to school districts, individual schools, and other educational institutions under SDE's jurisdiction ([CGS § 22-38d](#)).

For program information, see [DoAg's](#) and [SDE's](#) websites.

### ISSUES

How can a local farmer sell meat and produce to local schools? What are the potential challenges to doing so?

### SUMMARY

A local farmer can sell meat and produce to local schools by:

1. participating in Connecticut's farm-to-school program, which the Department of Agriculture (DoAg) administers in consultation with the state Department of Education (SDE), or
2. becoming a state contractor through the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) to sell food to state institutions.

DoAg, SDE, and DAS identified several potential challenges to farmers selling products to local schools, such as (1) an imbalance between the volume of product a school requires versus the volume a farmer can supply; (2) the ability of farmers to deliver product to schools in a cost-effective manner; and (3) other costs, including the cost of a third-party audit to verify good agricultural

practices.

### FARM-TO-SCHOOL PROGRAM

DoAg, in consultation with SDE, administers the state's farm-to-school program (see side box). By law, DoAg must:

1. encourage and solicit Connecticut farmers to sell their products to school districts, schools, and other educational institutions;
2. develop and regularly update a database of farmers interested in selling their products to Connecticut schools, including the types and amounts of products they want to sell and when they want to sell;
3. in consultation with SDE, facilitate purchases from local farmers by the districts, schools, and other educational institutions; and
4. provide outreach and guidance to farmers on the value of, and procedure for, selling their products to interested districts, schools, and educational institutions ([CGS § 22-38d\(a\)](#)).

The law requires SDE to:

1. encourage and solicit districts, schools, and educational institutions to purchase Connecticut-grown farm products;
2. provide outreach, guidance, and training to districts, parent and teacher organizations, schools, and school food service directors on the value of, and procedure for, purchasing these products and incorporating them into regular menus;
3. in consultation with DoAg, arrange for local, regional, and statewide events where potential purchasers and farmers can interact; and
4. arrange for interaction between students and farmers, including field trips to farms and farmer presentations at schools.

The law also requires SDE to establish the Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Week to promote Connecticut agriculture and foods to children through school meal and classroom programs at farms, farmers' markets, and other community locations. The event must be (1) established in consultation with DoAg, school food service directors, and interested farming organizations and (2) held every year in late September or early October ([CGS § 22-38d\(b\)](#)).

### ***Challenges***

According to DoAg, typical food procurement contracts are not well suited for bidding on by individual farmers. Contracts tend to call for large, long-term orders that supply many products, which farmers may find difficult to meet. Also, schools may require (1) deliveries that are not conducive to a farmer's schedule or (2) small quantities of product on a frequent basis because they lack storage space. These delivery requirements may not be cost-effective for farmers.

According to SDE, there are many requirements and considerations farmers and schools must evaluate when they plan on contracting for local farm products, such as:

1. meeting federal, state, and local procurement requirements, including whether the purchase falls under a small purchasing threshold or requires a formal request for proposal;
2. the volume of product the school requires versus the volume the farmer can supply;
3. product cost (there is a fixed reimbursement of federal funds to the school per meal and local boards of education determine the meal prices for paying students);
4. whether kitchen staff is trained to handle fresh farm products and there is adequate equipment to do so;
5. delivery procedures, as some farmers cannot make deliveries and schools may not have the staff or vehicles to pick up orders from a farm; and
6. whether a third-party audit is required.

Third-party audits are generally handled in Connecticut by DoAg, which is licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service to perform them. Audit requirements vary by school district and school. The audits (1) are to ensure that farmers follow good agricultural practices and (2) cost \$92 per hour plus a \$50 administrative fee. Audit results are valid for one year. (For more information about third-party audits, see DoAg's [website](#).)

According to USDA, local and state health departments dictate safety standards for food sold to schools. However, if schools procure meat products from local farmers, the meat must be slaughtered and processed in a facility inspected by the USDA Food Safety Inspection Service. (For more information about local meat in schools, see USDA's [fact sheet](#).)

## **STATE CONTRACTOR**

DAS works with state agencies to ensure locally grown products are included in food contract offerings. Among other things, it manages the USDA Federal Food Distribution for Connecticut, which coordinates the distribution of USDA foods to eligible public and private schools that provide meals to students. Purchases in this program are most often made at the municipal school level. DAS' procurement division works with state agencies to inform farmers of opportunities available through the statewide food contact.

Additionally, a local farmer who would like to do business with Connecticut as a state contractor could participate in a competitive bid process. Connecticut does not have any registration requirements for a company to participate in the process.

Farmers may search for bids on the state contracting [portal](#). They may also subscribe to the DAS bidder [notification service](#), which provides them with email announcements of procurement solicitations and addendums posted to DAS' website.

To learn more, farmers may visit DAS' procurement [website](#) for a list of frequently asked questions about doing business with the state.

### ***Challenges***

According to DAS, some challenges that farmers face when doing business with the state include meeting insurance and third-party audit requirements. They may also find it difficult to meet volume or quantity demands because product is needed throughout the school year and Connecticut generally has a short growing season.

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